

# Faith as a Proper Answer in Crisis: Expecting God's Intervention from Habakkuk's Perspective – Hab. 1:1-2:4

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## Abstract

*This article addresses the problem of preserving the faith in God while discouraging circumstances, based on the first part of Habakkuk's prophecy. The message of the book teaches us how to benefit from our faith by presenting the process through which the prophet overcomes the confusion around him, even in God's acting for his people. In the introduction, it is argued that faith is a basic principle of life, which can be questioned because of difficult circumstances. The first part of the article discusses why Habakkuk's prophecy can be understood as a "burden," and the second part presents the historical context of the book of Habakkuk. The third section discusses the internal and external crisis in Judah and the fourth section analyses the prophet's reaction against the Babylonian crisis. The fifth section described the faith as a proper response to the crisis (2:1-4) while the final section discusses implications of Habakkuk 2:4 for the teaching of the New Testament.*

*In general, we can see that in the first part of Habakkuk (1:1-2:4) the prophet questions the validity of his faith in God, because of the apparent long divine silence about injustice in Judah (1:2-4). Then, he was unhappy with God's answer, who decided to send a new crisis to solve the first crisis (1:5-6). After the prophet's complaint (1:7-2:1), God advises him and his people to trust His solution in overcoming the crisis (2:2-4). The insights from the message of Habakkuk analyzed in this article, may help the reader to preserve authentic faith in a time of crisis. Also, that pattern of living by faith from this Old Testament book is taken over by the New Testament authors so that Habakkuk's expression "the righteous live by their faith" (2:4), is quoted as*

*a key statement for the Gospel message of salvation (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38). But not only that, this statement defines the proper behavior of people in expecting the divine solution of salvation in the time of crisis.*

Keywords: *faith, crisis, Habakkuk, God, to live, the Gospel*

## Introduction

Faith is a basic principle of life for all people in general. However, even for Christians who are taught from the Scripture that they should live by faith, many times their faith is questioned, because of the circumstances in which they live, or because the principles adopted do not meet their expectations. Speaking of circumstances, the peoples of the Eastern European countries face a lot of challenges. The economic and social situation creates disappointment because the transition from Communism to Capitalism lasted more than they expected. In conjunction with that, the improvement of the economic situation is often delayed. Also, the radical changes in the area of spiritual and moral values of the secular society challenge traditional Christian values. The difficulties to accommodate the new economic and social changes leave all the people without solutions, and because of that, Christians can be very easily faced with a crisis of their faith.

Because the book of Habakkuk deals with the problem of preserving the faith in God in the midst of discouraging circumstances, we are interested to discover the way this book teaches us how to benefit from our faith. We will observe that the prophet questions the validity of his faith in God, because of the apparent long divine silence (1:2-4) (Davidson and Lanchester 1920, 60). Then, he was unhappy with God's answer, who informed him that the Babylonians would discipline the wicked among God's people (1:5-6). Hence, Habakkuk formulates another complaint, considering that God's solution does not seem satisfactory (1:7-2:1).<sup>1</sup> Even though the book of Habakkuk is important for the formulation of the New Testament theology and its message about faith amid a crisis is applicable for today, except his name, we know little about Habakkuk, we have no historical or genealogical information about him. Some suggested that he was one of the prophets who served at the Temple because we find in chapter 3, liturgical notes (3:1, 3, 9a, 13).

Notwithstanding all of that, the message of this book may help us discover important lessons about overcoming the crisis by faith. In Romania, we use the proverb "Hope dies last," underlying the importance of preserving faith in difficult times. Even though external circumstances are not the same as in Habak-

1 For more info, see Hadjiev 2020. *Joel, Obadiah, Habakkuk, Zephaniah: An Introduction and Study Guide*, chapter 10.

kuk's time, we could draw some parallels from Habakkuk with the current crisis in our societies. That being said, the message of Habakkuk may help people, in general, to find out solutions to the present dilemmas, but also assist believers to preserve authentic faith in a time of crisis. When we take into consideration everything that is going on in the world today, that may challenge even the faith of many sincere believers.

## 1. The Prophecy as a Burden

That the prophet Habakkuk is experiencing tensions and that his message was delivered in a time of distress, of crisis, we can observe from the way the prophet named his message. The heading calls the book an "oracle" (1:1), which is somewhat an unusual word for naming an oracle. Namely, the Hebrew word *maššā'* (מַשָּׂא) means a "physical burden" (Ex. 23:5; Num. 4:27; 2 Kings 8:9). Used figuratively, the word is referring to an oracle of judgment, usually, against nations (Is. 13:1; 17:1; 21:11; Zech. 9:1; 12:1), and besides Habakkuk, it is used as a heading in two other books from the Minor Prophets: Nahum 1:1, and Malachi 1:1. We may say that Habakkuk's oracle is a "burden" because of the external situations but also due to the content of what he must speak.

Furthermore, in the heading, the author is called a *prophet* (1:1), which means that, in the biblical context, we have to consider him as an inspired spokesman (Gen. 20:7; Deut. 34:10). He is someone who has a calling from God (Ex. 3:4, 10) to deliver certain from God to the people (1 Kings 22:19; Ezek. 33:7-9; Hos. 1:2; Amos 3:7; 7:14-15), and is invested with divine authority (Deut. 18:18). However, Habakkuk is an unusual prophet, because in his prophecy he first pleads for his people before God (1:2-4, 12-16), but later he receives a divine message for his people. He did not "hear" his message but "sees" it (רָאָה) (1:1), and this verb is used especially in poetical texts to describe someone who saw God (Ex. 24:11; Job 19:26-27; Ps. 17:15) or had a prophetic vision (Is. 1:1; Ezek. 12:27; Zech. 10:2). Accordingly, Habakkuk perceived the message of the book in a divine vision.

## 2. The Historical Context of the Crisis

From the internal data within the book, we find out that God will send the Chaldeans ("Babylonians") to punish the evil in Judah 1:5-6 (Keil 1989, 59). The rise up of the Chaldeans appears to be a surprise for Habakkuk. Babylonians became a military power since 626 BC when they declared independence from the Assyrian Empire. The complaints of the prophet concerning the confusing situation from Judah (1:2-4) seem to place the time of composition after the reign of the king Manasseh. Then Judah reached the climax in her apostasy (2 Chron. 33:9).

But when did Habakkuk wrote his prophecy? According to one position, we may place the writing of the book sometime between 640 BC, when Josiah the son of Manasseh became king of Judah, and the year 626 BC when the Babylonians were becoming a threat to the surrounding nations. Since king Josiah started his religious reforms in Judah, in the 12<sup>th</sup> year of his reign (2 Chron. 34:3), around 628 BC, the writing of Habakkuk could take place sometime before this date. According to other positions, some theologians suggest that the internal evidence in Habakkuk 1:12-17 and 2:6-20, support a writing date after the fall of Nineveh 612 BC when the prophet knew the power and ruin caused by the Babylonian wars. Based on that solution, that would mean that the dialogue between God and Habakkuk lasted for about 30 years, beginning in 626 (Armerding 1954, 493). Accordingly, we cannot date the writing of the book after Josiah reestablished order in the country. Another argument for rejecting a later date is, that the complaints of Habakkuk from 1:2-4 are not justified, after 605 BC, because at that time the Babylonians, already invaded Judah. Nebuchadnezzar took the first captives from the nation. Then in 586 BC the Temple and Jerusalem were destroyed.

Taking all of that into consideration, we may conclude that the political context of that time allowed Judah to concentrate on the internal problems, and on an international scale, Habakkuk seems to address the period of transition. Namely, he witnessed the fall of Assyria and the rise up of Babylon. After the death of Esarhaddon, Ashurbanipal his third son came to the throne of Assyria in 668 BC. At this time the empire was at its height. However, toward the end of his reign, the situation started to deteriorate. In the year 653, Shamash-shum-ukin, the brother of Ashurbanipal, growing weary of being controlled by his domineering brother, established Babylon as an independent kingdom, being supported by the Chaldeans and Elamites. This situation weakened the power of the Assyrians. Then, in 630 BC, to the throne of Assyria, came the son of Ashurbanipal: Ashuretiliani. From 626 BC the Babylonians, under the rule of Nabopolassar, drew the Near East under Babylonian control. Accordingly, we may understand Habakkuk's focus on domestic issues, in the context of international political upheaval.<sup>2</sup>

### 3. The Double Crisis in Judah

The book of Habakkuk reveals an internal crisis present in the community of Judah, addressed by the prophet, then the text predicts to the prophet, by way of

2 Concerning a different date Habakkuk's prophecy, namely during the Babylonian captivity and the significance of the word *massa*, see the article of Gert Prinsloo, "Inner-biblical Allusion in Habakkuk's מַסָּא (Hab 1:1-2:20) and Utterances Concerning Babylon in Isaiah 13-23 (Isa 13:1-14:23; 21:1-10)."

dialogue, an external crisis which will come over the people of God, through the Babylonians. The book announces the coming of the external crisis, the sender of it, the reaction of those who will experience the crisis, and the advice of Yahweh for those who want to overcome it, namely: to trust in God.

### 3.1. *The Internal Crisis (1:2-4)*

In this section, the prophet doubts concerning God's delay in punishing the wicked from Judah, and the social context seems to support the prophet's complaint. Habakkuk begins his address to Yahweh – the God of Israel (1:2), who revealed to Moses in Exodus 3:14 *ehyeh asher ehyeh* which can be translated as: "I will be that I will be." God identifies himself by the verb הָיָה "to be" in the future, and the possible meaning of this is that the believer will discover who God is, in the future, by trusting him. However, Habakkuk is disappointed. He asks God "How long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen?" (1:2).<sup>3</sup> The question "how long" shows that the wicked acted abusively in the land, for a good while, without God stopping them. The prophet continues by asking: "Why" (1:3) because the tension increased. He cried for help while experiencing despair (Job 19:7; Ps. 18:41; Is. 58:9), and all of that is because God did "not listen?" (1:2) (Pusey 1953, 179). This verb "to listen" (שָׁמַע) is used more than 1000 times in the Bible: Adam and Eve heard the voice of God in Eden (Gen. 3:9) and then run away; in the famous passage, known as "Shema Israel," advising Israel to obey God's commandments (Deut. 6:4); in Isaiah 1:2, the heavens are commanded to listen what God will testify against his people, etc. It seems that by that usage of the verb, the prophet expects God's answer from heaven, and not only that, that verb requires an immediate answer. However, God is silent,<sup>4</sup> but he "cry" out to God (1:2). And this cry is a cry for help of a person who is in despair.

God's intervention was required because there was "violence" (חָמָס) in the country (1:2) (Brownlee 1979, 46) – violence extended on a large scale. The word is repeated in 1:3, and it implies cruelty, injustice, physical violence (Judg. 9:24) of an oppressor (Prov. 3:31). There was also "wrongdoing" (רָעָה) among people (1:3), which is the term that describes the emptiness, falsehood and deceit in relationships (Ps. 10:7; Prov. 17:4), and the futility of worshiping to idols (Is. 66:3). In 1:3 God is accused of looking "at trouble" (צָרָה) which stand for all kinds of difficulties (Jer. 20:18), caused by sin (1:13). Ecclesiastes uses this word to show the futility of people's toil in life (Eccles. 2:10-11). "Destruction" (רָעָה) is before the prophet's eyes, and this word describes, among other things, the results of

3 The english version of the biblical verses were taken from *New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)*, except when it is mentioned a different version of the Bible.

4 See Exodus 20:3, 4, 7, 13-17 (cf. Kelley 1992, 173).

violence caused by robbery, spoiling and desolation (Is. 22:4; Jer. 6:7; Amos 3:10). There was also “strife” (רִיב) – a word that signifies quarrel, dispute and open hostilities among the people (Gen. 13:7; Judg. 12:2), and “contention” (מִדְּוִי) – these unending disputes which perpetuated in the community and worsen the relationships among people (Prov. 17:14; 18:19, Jer. 15:10).

All these problems affected the morality in the country which can be seen from the statement in 1:4: “So the law becomes slack.” “The law” (תּוֹרָה) which stands for instruction, direction received from parents (Prov. 1:8), or God (Deut. 17:11; Job 22:22), in the biblical context, can refer to the whole book of Deuteronomy (Deut. 1:5), or the five books of Moses (Josh. 1:8; 1 Kings 2:3; Neh. 8:1). By saying that the law of God became “slack,” the prophet is saying that God’s *Torah* is paralyzed by being ignored by people (Gen. 45:26; Ps. 38:8) (Brown, Driver and Briggs 1996, 785). Therefore, the result of that is that “the wicked surround the righteous,” and “judgment comes forth perverted.”<sup>5</sup>

### 3.2. *The External Crisis Provoked by the Babylonians (1:5-11)*

God’s answer to the prophet’s complaint about the internal crisis is surprising. He said that the internal crisis will be solved by an external crisis, which will come over Judah. Habakkuk 1:5 is advised to “look at the nations, and see!” The verbs used here are in the imperative mode. The prophet is first urged to “look,” (רָא) to know something (Deut. 1:31; 33:9; Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 21, 31), and this activity involves the will of the person in searching (Gen. 42:9, 12). The second verb “to see” (רָא), implies to focus on something. It describes the keen observation of something (Job 39:29; Gen. 15:5; 19:17, 1 Kings 18:43). In a figurative sense, it means to consider while looking at something (1 Sam. 16:7; Amos 5:22). Habakkuk is advised to amaze himself “Be astonished! Be astounded!” (1:5). The expression is a special construction with two imperatives of the same verb (הִתְרַחֵם) (hitpael imperative masculine plural and qal imperative) (Beall, Banks and Smith 1990, 284). The verb means to be shocked at something (Gen. 43:33), unexpected (Eccles. 5:8), namely God’s coming judgment, and the repetition of the verb expresses the highest degree of amazement (cf. Zeph. 2:1). God will perform “a work” in their days (1:5), that is, God will do something that would be hard “to believe”, even “if you were told” (1:5). The verb “to believe” (אָמַן) means to support, to establish, or

5 Some argue that “the righteous” in 1:4 refers to the “teacher of righteousness” from Qumran, who was persecuted by the “evil priest,” because the terms are singular in the Qumran manuscript (Robertson 1990, 140). But regardless of that position, the prophet describes the situation where God’s law is not only avoided but “perverted,” and because of all of that, we can understand what motivates prophet to condemn God’s silence, and to question his justice. For more about the Teacher of Righteousness, see Lim 2020, 32. For more concerning the Wicked Priest and the *Qumran Manuscript of Habakkuk*, see Lim 2020, 19–21.

to be firm (2 Kings 18:16; Is. 22:23). It carries the idea of confidence and stability. In a figurative sense, it means faithfulness, the trustworthiness of somebody or something (Deut. 7:9; Ps. 19:7; Mic. 7:5). It has also the meaning of accepting something as true (Gen. 15:6; 2 Chron. 20:20; Jon. 3:5).

Based on all the above observations, we may say that God advised the prophet to believe the work he announced, even though it does not seem credible. The promised divine work was hard to be accepted. Therefore God needed to underline in the next chapter, the importance of believing the divine word (2:2-4). Faith is how God is dealing with people. Despite experiencing all kinds of difficulties, believers have to expect a solution from God. In many circumstances, God seems to keep silent. Therefore people are tempted to question the promised divine work, but God's solutions are often astonishing. People are required to believe it, even though it does not seem plausible, and such an act of believing may go beyond human understanding. Accordingly, many times God's work is hard to be accepted, even though it was communicated to the believers (1:5) (Longman III, Garland and Hill 2012, 253). The verb "was told" (סָפַר) from this verse (1:5), describes an important divine communication. It is used in this manner in Exodus 18:8 and Jeremiah 51:10. The use of the verb shows that the message was clearly explained to the prophet, but the fulfillment of it will be still shocking, because of the dramatic consequences which will follow.

Then this divine work is detailed in 1:6-11. God announced: "I am rousing the Chaldeans" (1:6). The expression "I am rousing" (קָוִים) tells us that the Chaldean's invasion in Judah, is God's initiative (Amos 6:14; Mic. 5:4), and from what we know about them, the Chaldeans (Kasdim) are the inhabitants of Babylonia (Is. 43:14; Jer. 32:4,24; Ezek. 23:23),<sup>6</sup> they lived since immemorial times in Mesopotamia (Babylonia), and in Jeremiah 5:15 they are called "an old nation." Based on Genesis 22:22, Kesed, the son of Abraham's brother Nahor, was the ancestor of Chaldeans, and so it is not surprising that in Genesis 11:28-31 we read how Abraham came to Canaan from Ur the Chaldees.

In 1:6 the Chaldeans are described as "fierce" (מָר). The basic meaning of that word is "bitter," but in the biblical context in a figurative meaning can describe the results of unending fighting (2 Sam. 2:26), be associated with crying or mourning (Gen. 27:34; Esther 4:1) or with the "bitterness" of death (1 Sam. 15:32). By describing the Chaldeans in this way, we can realize that the Chaldeans will bring violence, death, and mourning in Judah. They are also "impetuous" (מִהָרָה), in trying to encompass as much as land possible "to seize dwellings not their own." Furthermore, the Chaldeans in 1:7 are described as "dreadful" (יָרָא), which in the biblical context, can have both positive and negative connotations.

6 Information about the Babylonians may be found in Walton 1978, 65. See also Archer 1994, 401.

For example, Adam and Eve experienced *fear* after ignoring God's command in Eden (Gen. 3:10), but in Deuteronomy 7:18 and 21, God instructs his people not to be *afraid* of the nations that live in the Promised Land, because God will fight for them. Also, in Proverbs 1:7 "the fear of the Lord" (noun derived from the verb אָרָא) is something positive because it describes the reverence toward God. Again, it seems that the message the prophet is saying is that, because Judah *did not fear* God and despised his Law (1:4), she will now experience *the terror* caused by Chaldeans.

The horses of the Babylonian army "are swifter than leopards, more menacing than wolves at dusk" (1:8), where "menacing" (רָחַק) stands for the description of their "sharpness" (Ezek. 21:9-11). The horsemen "fly like an eagle swift to devour" (1:8) and by using the verb "to fly" (רָחַק) the prophet compares their speed with the flying of a bird (Deut. 4:17; cf. 2 Sam. 22:11). Their objective is "to devour" (אָכַל). Even though this verb has the sense of "eating" (Gen. 3:6, 11; Ex. 34:15), it is also used for the consuming of a burnt offering by fire (Lev. 6:10), for the description of the consequences of the divine judgment (Deut. 4:24; 32:42), or to lay claim to space, to take possession of it (Ezek. 42:5).

In 1:9, the captives taken by the oppressor are compared with the "sand." Concerning how the Babylonians were marching "through the breadth of the earth to seize dwellings not their own," we see that they had a well-prepared strategy: "violence" (אָכַל). However, we see that God will use their violence to stop Judah's violence (1:2). For the description of their violence through which they frightened the oppressed, the prophet is using very pictorial language or language that is filled with imagery. Hence, "At kings they scoff, and of rulers they make sport (1:10). For them, the siege of a city is a trivial thing (Yadin 1963, 17, 20, 315; Armerding 1954, 503) because "They laugh at every fortress" (1:10). They are a threat to the nations, because "then they sweep by like the wind" (1:11). Their army is like a tempest "sweeping" (רָחַק) the land. A similar description of passing or swiftness is used in Isaiah 8:8, concerning the Assyrian army. Accordingly, we can see that in the Bible God can use other nations and kings to serve his eternal purpose. So, Assyria is called "the rod of my anger" (Is. 10:5), and the Persian king Cyrus is called God's anointed (Is. 45:1). In the same way in Habakkuk, God "has marked" Babylonians "for judgment... have established them for punishment" (1:12) of Israel.

God considers the Babylonians "guilty" (אָשָׁם) before him (1:11), and we can notice two things regarding this verb. First, the verb can mean "to go beyond" defining the guilt in the sense of overstepping a command of God (cf. Josh. 7:11, 15). In that sense, the Babylonians will give account to God, for "they transgress." Second, it can describe the sentiment experienced as a result of sin (Lev. 4:13; 5:2-5; Ezek. 25:12; Hos. 13:16). Accordingly, the solution was to confess the guilt (Lev. 5:5), but the Babylonians do not do it. On contrary, they consider "their might"

as “their god” because their power provides them will all they need. Furthermore, they consider themselves the etalon for “justice and dignity” (1:7). This verse is translated by some as describing the Babylonian army, by comparing them with the “wind” (רוּחַ) who devastates. Some translation read this word as “spirit” and not the “wind,” and read the verb “guilty” (וַאֲשַׁם) as a form of the verb אָשַׁם, which means “to be astonished,” as it was suggested by scribal punctuation. In this case, the sentence could be translated: “The spirit passed on and departed, and I was astonished,” referring to the cessation of the divine revelation, started in Habakkuk 1:5.

#### 4. The Prophet's Reaction Against the Babylonian Crisis (1:12-17)

Habakkuk was unhappy with God's solution to the internal crisis from Judah. He questions God's plan, by recalling his eternal experience. “Are you not from of old” (1:12). The word “old” (קִדְמִים) used here describes “ancient times” in the history of Israel (Neh. 12:46; Ps. 77:11; Is. 45:21; Mic. 5:2) or even refer to the works of God before the creation of the world (Prov. 8:22). Furthermore, the prophet says to God: “You shall not die!” (1:12). Even though MT reads as “we shall not die” (לֹא נָמוּת), according to F. F. Bruce (1993, 853), this is one of the eighteen early *tiqqune soferim* or corrections of the scribes which was reproduced in the Septuagint as well, which replaced an original “you do not die.” This deliberate scribal change of the text was done to avoid offensive language toward God as God could die. When we take these two statements together, the prophet is saying that an eternal God has the right to make decisions and the authority of God to judge the nations (Kelley 1992, 173). By considering that the holiness of God (“my Holy One”, 1:12) the prophet also demonstrates that His holiness is in contradiction with his toleration of the wicked Babylonians.

Often, people question God's solutions to their problems. Accordingly, what we have here is a *theodicy*, which asks: How it is possible as a holy God to punish Judah, using a more wicked nation – the Chaldeans? Despite that, Habakkuk refuses to be disappointed by God. Therefore, in 1:12 he calls him the “Rock” (צוּר) which is the noun that could mean the foundation of a building (Josh. 6:26; 1 Kings 5:17), and metaphor of God as a “rock” is common in the Old Testament (see Deut. 32:4; Ps. 18:3 [2]; 19:15 [14]; Is. 30:29, etc.).<sup>7</sup> In Habakkuk's view, the divine solution does not fit the character of God, because his “eyes are too pure to behold evil” (1:13). The word “evil” (רָע) is the general term defying evil in an

7 This imagery of stone applies to Jesus Christ as well in the New Testament: The New Testament identifies the “cornerstone” with Christ who has to be trusted (1 Pet. 2:6-10; Ps. 118:22; Is. 8:14, 28:16). Christ is “the living stone,” rejected by “those who do not believe” (1 Pet. 2:7).

absolute sense. This word is used, for example, in connection with the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:9, 16-17; 3:5, 22). Since God cannot tolerate evil, Adam and Eve were driven out of Eden. The same word is used, for example, to describe the Day of God's judgment (Amos 6:3). But here in Habakkuk, it seems that God looks at the treacherous situation, remaining "silent when the wicked swallow those more righteous than they" (1:13). According to Robert Donel Haak (1992, 49), the verb "swallow" (עָלַץ) is used both to describe the external enemies of Judah (Jer. 51:34, 44) and evildoer within the nation (Prov. 1:12). Even God is described in this way in Job 10:8. Here, however, the word accentuates the speed and efficiency of the Babylonian army in achieving its goal.

In the next verses (1:14-17) the prophet compares the situation, with a fisherman (1:14) who catches fish or other small animals (Gen 1:24-26) "with a hook" (1:15). Into his net "he gathers them in his seine" (1:15). Then "he rejoices and exults", without being disturbed (1:15). But to whom this text refers? According to James Bruckner (2004, EPUB Location 234): "The joy of the wicked fisherman bothers Habakkuk (1:14-17). The heart of his objection is the apparent enjoyment and success that the wicked find in their cruel actions. The center of his description of the fisherman (1:14-16) is 'so he rejoices and is glad' (1:15b)." Bruckner furthermore observes that the prophet brings nine objections against the fishermen (the Babylonians), namely: he pulls the more righteous into his hook, he catches the more righteous in his net, he gathers him up in his dragnet, he is rejoicing, he is glad, he deifies his net, and his dragnet, while living in luxury and enjoying the choicest food. Bruckner divides these objections against the oppressor into three categories, which portray the aggressor as being abusive, false worshiper, and practicing a high living by using violence.

Habakkuk points out the fact that, on the one hand, Judah seems to be without a master. On the other hand, Babylonians exult when dividing the spoils (cf. Is. 9:3) which led them to divinize and worship their power, strategy, and victories. Because of all that confusing situation, the prophet decided to wait "on the rampart" (2:1) for further explanations. It seems that Habakkuk had a guarding post, a place of prayer (cf. Is. 21:8), where he waited to see what God "will answer" to him (2:1) (Clarke 1967, 743).<sup>8</sup>

## 5. The Faith as a Proper Response to Crisis (2:1-4)

Up to this point, we read only about calamities and situation that seems confusing for the prophet. However, in this section, God shows up and explains to the prophet how he and his people will survive this crisis. Despite all kinds of

8 See also Armerding 1954, 494.

hardships “the righteous live by their faith” (2:4) or “the righteous” will survive (Fawcett 2019). The word “just” (יָדָיִק) describes someone who is just, lawful in government (2 Kings 10:9; Ezek. 23:45), in defending one's cause (Prov. 29:2), or in conduct and character (Gen. 6:9 - Noah). The word also depicts somebody who is vindicated by God (Ex. 9:27; Ezra 9:15). We know from the Bible that the Scripture divides all the people into two categories: “righteous” and “wicked” (Mal. 3:18). We also know that those who are “righteous” can sometimes suffer under the hand of the “wicked.” When we take these things together, the point is that even though the present situation is terrible, there is hope for the righteous.

The good news is that the righteous will “live” (2:4) (חַיָּה). This verb can describe being kept alive in danger (Gen. 6:19-20; 19:19; 50:20) or depicts the idea of being safe (Gen. 12:13; Num. 14:38). Also, God's Word is described as being able to give and preserve life (Ps. 119:25, 37, 40). All these meanings come forth in Habakkuk 2:4, and this is well summarized by Don Garlington (2003, 226):

The fact that a nation far more sinful than Israel should be the instrument of her judgment occasions a crisis of faith on Habakkuk's part. In the face of his pleas, God answers that in time he will punish the Chaldeans for their iniquity. In the meantime, however, the righteous of Israel will “live,” i.e. by their fidelity to the covenant they will survive the enemy invasion and return to their own land. Such is the original meaning of “the righteous will live by his faith(fulness).” The focus is not on how one becomes righteous; but rather, the righteousness of the covenant is presupposed. And Yahweh's assurance to the prophet is just that the righteous person will live through judgment and ultimately be vindicated (“justified”).

The message of God to his people is that those who obey God's command are assured that they will live (Prov. 4:4; Jer. 27:12), and to the righteous in Judah the life is guaranteed. The righteous would be able to live “by their faith,” that is, they need to stay firm and be faithful to God's vision. Hence, we could say that the word “faith” here has the idea of firmness in sticking to the prophecy. The rabbis went even further to say that Habakkuk 2:4 is the summary of the Law of Moses in one commandment (Robertson 1990, 169). But taking into the consideration wider biblical context “faith(fulness)” of the person is just one side of the coin because God is described also as being faithful, loyal (Ps. 33:4; 100:5; 119:90) to his people. Those who are faithful, reliable to God's vision, at the end will be blessed (2 Chron. 19:9; Prov. 12:22; 28:20).

## **6. Habakkuk 2:4 in the Book of Romans**

Worthy of mentioning is that the authors of the New Testament are quoting Habakkuk's expression “the righteous live by their faith” (2:4), to support the Gospel teaching about salvation (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38). The message of this

expression is a prophetic announcement of the Gospel message, and so it is important to observe the way Paul uses this quotation from Habakkuk 2:4 in his letter to the Romans.<sup>9</sup>

First, we see that in Romans 1:16-17 Paul connects the faith with the power of the Gospel in *vindicating* the sinner through faith in Christ's expiatory death and through his victorious life, which is a source of the new life (identification through baptism, Rom. 6:1-6), for all those who accept this solution: "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, "The one who is righteous will live by faith" (Rom. 1:17).

The faith in Romans is seen also as a *mental assent* as Paul exhorts the reader to consider themselves dead to sin: "So you also must consider [λογίζομαι] yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 6:11). However, we should realize that this mental assent should be demonstrated in practice and not only be a matter of conviction that does not affect practical everyday life.

Surely, this faith is also understood by Paul as *confidence* in God as Paul writes in Romans 5:5 that "hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us." Accordingly, the use of the word "faith" in Romans, rooted in the Old Testament (Hab. 2:4) has the meaning of *faithful living*. And as Paul would explain in Romans 8:1-2, this faithful living of the believer occurs through the power of the Spirit. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death" (Rom. 8:5-10). So, we can say that the term "faith," which is grounded in the message of the Gospel, with all of the richness of its meanings, is a general solution according to Habakkuk for his context, the context of the New Testament, but also for us today. In other words, trusting in God amid difficult and confusing circumstances is the right behavior of the people of God in relationship to the crisis at all times.

## Conclusion

Analyzing the book of Habakkuk from the perspective of overcoming the crisis and keeping in mind the relationship of the message of the first part of the book with the New Testament, we may conclude that the book presents a pattern of God's dealing with his people, especially when their faith is tested in difficult circumstances. Accordingly, when believers are experiencing all kinds of difficulties, they should expect God's intervention in the crisis. However, believers

9 About the influence of the expression form Habakkuk 2:4, on Augustin, M. Luther, as part of the Gospel, see Fawcett 2019.

can also experience situations when God seems to delay answering their prayers. Because of this, the afflicted ones are tempted to question the divine intervention. But despite these stressful circumstances, people are required to trust in God's solution, even though it does not seem plausible. From this book, we understand that the act of believing goes beyond human logic.

We also have to realize that the advice given by God to his people in Habakkuk (2:4), is prophetic and used in the New Testament as a core statement of the Gospel message (Rom. 1:16, 17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38). It describes faithful living to God's revelation that is communicated through his prophets such as Habakkuk, for the faithful ones. No matter what is happening, the believer is called to trust God's word, and God assures his people that his message will be the best answer to his difficult questions. This is not always easy to apply, but that is the message of Habakkuk 2:4 and the New Testament as well.

However, we should not overlook that the Old Testament, as well as the New Testament, speak also about the consequence of unfaithfulness, that is, God's judgment. We observe that even though the book of Romans can be considered the most systematic presentation of the Gospel – salvation by faith, the book starts with saying that all people need salvation from the wrath of God. So Paul writes in Romans 1:18-32 about the divine judgment against the wicked: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth" (Rom. 1:18). However, for those who have "faith" – a rich biblical word that has many layers of meaning – God is promising life. This reassuring message about "faith" and "life" and "unfaithfulness" and "judgment" was a powerful message for Habakkuk's time, New Testament time, and is still valid for us today.

If we compare the message of Habakkuk with the way people in Romania understood faith, we may say that there are similarities between the context in which Habakkuk lived and the historical context in which Romanians lived. The challenge of the Communist regime during the second part of the twentieth century A.D. is a period in which the Church had to fight against the atheistic ideology and survive under persecution. The Christians had the impression that God had forgotten them and that the wicked overcame the righteous. However, it could be argued the vast majority of Christians in Romania had an appropriate attitude in expecting God's intervention. An argument in support for this is the determination of Romanians to preserve the Christian faith, not only during the communist regime but also during the long history of oppression under the Ottoman Empire (about a half of a millennium). However, the attack also came from inside, because many Christian leaders compromised their faith by collaborating with the communist regime and in this way contributed to the persecution of the Church.

In conclusion, we can say that the message of Habbakuk is still valid today and this study may help Christians to understand the proper meaning of faith in God. The faith which was required from Habakkuk and his audience is the faith that we have in the message of the Gospel. By trusting in God's promises which are recorded in the Scripture, we may experience God's intervention in our lives, despite all crises and difficult circumstances. The reader is challenged to count on God's solution even when the immediate experience seems to contest the divine solution.

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### **Vjera kao najbolji mogući odgovor u kriznim vremenima: Očekujući Božju intervenciju iz Habakukove perspektve – Habakuk 1,1-2,4**

Sažetak

Ovaj se članak, na temelju prvog dijela Habakukova proročanstva, bavi problemom očuvanja vjere u Boga usred obeshrabrujućih okolnosti. Ova nas proročka knjiga uči kako koristiti dobrobiti svoje vjere, predstavljajući proces kroz koji prorok prevladava zbunjujuće okolnosti u kojima čak i Božje djelovanje za

njegov narod izaziva sumnju. U uvodnom se dijelu kreće od postavke da je vjera osnovno načelo života, koje, međutim, u teškim okolnostima može biti dovedeno u pitanje. Prvi dio članka raspravlja o tome zašto se Habakukovo proročanstvo može razumjeti kao „teret“, dok drugi dio članka donosi povijesni kontekst Habakukove knjige. Treći dio govori o unutarnjoj i vanjskoj krizi u Judi, dok se u četvrtom analizira prorokova reakcija protiv babilonske krize. U petom se dijelu opisuje vjera kao pravi odgovor na krizu (2,1-4), dok se u posljednjem dijelu članka govori o implikacijama teksta Habakuka 2,4 za učenje Novog zavjeta.

Općenito uzevši, u prvom dijelu Habakukova teksta (1,1-2,4) vidimo da prorok dovodi u pitanje valjanost svoje vjere u Boga, izgleda zbog duge božanske šutnje o nepravdi koja se događa u Judi (1,2-4). Potom je prorok nezadovoljan Božjim rješenjem slanja nove krize sa svrhom rješavanja unutarnje krize u Judi (1,5-6). Nakon što se prorok požali na takvo Božje rješenje (1,7-2,1), Bog savjetuje njemu i narodu da imaju vjere u Njegovo rješenje prevladavanja krize (2,2-4). Uvid u Habakukovu poruku, koji se razmatra u ovom članku, može pomoći čitatelju pri očuvanju autentične vjere u vrijeme krize. Takav starozavjetni obrazac života po vjeri također preuzimaju pisci Novog zavjeta te se Habakukova tvrdnja „pravedni žive po vjeri“ (2,4) navodi kao ključna tvrdnja evanđeoske poruke spasenja (Rim 1,17; Gal 3,11; Heb 10,38). Osim toga, ova tvrdnja definira pravilno ponašanje vjernih u uvjetima iščekivanja božanskoga spasonosnog rješenja u vrijeme krize.